

The Doctrine of Justification 1. Introduction

by A.W. Pink

A.W. Pink's sermon emphasizes the critical importance of understanding the doctrine of justification as foundational to the Christian faith and experience.

Scripture: Job 25:4, Daniel 9:24, Micah 6:6-7, Romans 1:17, Romans 3:26, Romans 4:13, Romans 8:1, Ephesians 1:6, 2 Timothy 3:16, Revelation 12:10

Topics: "Justification", "Righteousness of God"

Description

A.W. Pink introduces the doctrine of justification, emphasizing its critical importance in the Christian faith and the alarming ignorance surrounding it in contemporary times. He argues that understanding justification is essential for restoring one's relationship with God, as it addresses the fundamental question of how sinners can be accepted by a holy God. Pink highlights that this doctrine is not merely theoretical but has profound implications for every believer's life, providing peace and assurance amidst guilt and sin. He stresses the need for a deep understanding of the righteousness of God, which is central to justification, and warns against the dangers of misunderstanding this vital truth. Ultimately, Pink aims to illuminate the path to divine acceptance through Christ's atoning work, encouraging believers to grasp the significance of their justification.

Transcript

THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION

1. INTRODUCTION

Our first thought was to devote an introductory chapter unto a setting forth the principle errors which have been entertained upon this subject by different men and parties, but after more deliberation we decided this would be for little or no profit to the majority of our readers. While there are times, no doubt, when it becomes the distasteful duty of God's servants to expose that which is calculated to deceive and injure His people, yet, as a general rule, the most effective way of getting rid of darkness is to let in the light.

We desire, then, to pen these articles in the spirit of the godly John Owen, who, in the introduction to his ponderous treatise on this theme said, "More weight is to be put on the steady guidance of the mind and conscience of one believer, really exercised about the foundation of his peace and acceptance with God, than on the confutation of ten wrangling disputers. . . To declare and vindicate the truth unto the instruction and edification of such as love it in sincerity, to extricate their minds from those difficulties in this particular

instance, which some endeavor to cast on all Gospel mysteries, to direct the consciences of them that inquire after abiding peace with God, and to establish the minds of them that do believe, are the things I have aimed at."

There was a time, not so long ago, when the blessed truth of Justification was one of the best known doctrines of the Christian faith, when it was regularly expounded by the preachers, and when the rank and file of church-goers were familiar with its leading aspects. But now, alas, a generation has arisen which is well-nigh totally ignorant of this precious theme, for with very rare exceptions it is no longer given a place in the pulpit, nor is scarcely anything written thereon in the religious magazines of our day; and, in consequence, comparatively few understand what the term itself connotes, still less are they clear as to the ground on which God justifies the ungodly.

This places the writer at a considerable disadvantage, for while he wishes to avoid a superficial treatment of so vital a subject, yet to go into it deeply, and enter into detail, will make a heavy tax upon the mentality and patience of the average person. Nevertheless, we respectfully urge each Christian to make a real effort to gird up the loins of his mind and seek to prayerfully master these chapters. That which will make it harder to follow us through the present series is the fact that we are here treating of the doctrinal side of truth, rather than the practical; the judicial, rather than the experimental.

Not that doctrine is impracticable; no indeed; far, far from it. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable (first) for doctrine, (and then) for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). Doctrinal instruction was ever the foundation from which the Apostles issued precepts to regulate the walk. Not until the 6th chapter will any exhortation be found in the Roman Epistle: the first five are devoted entirely to doctrinal exposition.

So again in the Epistle to the Ephesians: not until 4:1 is the first exhortation given. First the saints are reminded of the exceeding riches of God's grace, that the love of Christ may constrain them; and then they are urged to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith they are called. While it be true that a real mental effort (as well as a prayerful heart) is required in order to grasp intelligently some of the finer distinctions which are essential to a proper apprehension of this doctrine, yet, let it be pointed out that the truth of justification is far from being a mere piece of abstract speculation.

No, it is a statement of Divinely revealed fact; it is a statement of fact in which every member of our race ought to be deeply interested in. Each one of us has forfeited the favor of God, and each one of us needs to be restored to His favor. If we are not restored, then the outcome must inevitably be our utter ruin and hopeless perdition. How fallen creatures, how guilty rebels, how lost sinners, are restored to the favor of God, and given a standing before Him inestimably superior to that occupied by the holy angels, will (D.

V.) engage our attention as we proceed with our subject. As said Abram Booth in his splendid work "The Reign of Grace" (written in 1768), "Far from being a merely speculative point, it spreads its influence through the whole body of divinity (theology), runs through all Christian experience, and operates in every part of practical godliness. Such is its grand importance, that a mistake about it has a malignant efficacy, and is attended with a long train of dangerous consequences.

Nor can this appear strange, when it is considered that this doctrine of justification is no other than the way of a sinner's acceptance with God. Being of such peculiar moment, it is inseparably connected with many other evangelical truths, the harmony and beauty of which we cannot behold, while this is misunderstood. Till this appears in its glory, they will be involved in darkness. It is, if anything may be so called, a

fundamental article; and certainly requires our most serious consideration" (from his chapter on "Justification").

The great importance of the doctrine of justification was sublimely expressed by the Dutch Puritan, Witsius, when he said, "It tends much to display the glory of God, whose most exalted perfections shine forth with an eminent lustre in this matter. It sets forth the infinite goodness of God, by which He was inclined to procure salvation freely for lost and miserable man, 'to the praise of the glory of His grace' (Eph. 1:6). It displays also the strictest justice, by which He would not forgive even the smallest offense, but on condition of the sufficient engagement, or full satisfaction of the Mediator, 'that He might be just, and the Justifier of him which believeth in Jesus' (Rom 3:26).

It shows further the unsearchable wisdom of the Deity, which found out a way for the exercise of the most gracious act of mercy, without injury to His strictest justice and infallible truth, which threatened death to the sinner: justice demanded that the soul that sinned should die (Rom. 1:32). Truth had pronounced the curses for not obeying the Lord (Deut. 28:15-68). Goodness, in the meantime, was inclined to adjudge life to some sinners, but by no other way than what became the majesty of the most holy God.

Here wisdom interposed, saying, 'I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for Mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins' (Isa. 43:25). Nor shall you, His justice and His truth have any cause of complaint because full satisfaction shall be made to you by a mediator. Hence the incredible philanthropy of the Lord Jesus shineth forth, who, though Lord of all, was made subject to the law, not to the obedience of it only, but also to the curse: 'hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him' (2 Cor. 5:21).

Ought not the pious soul, who is deeply engaged in the devout meditation of these things, to break out into the praises of a justifying God, and sing with the church, "Who is a God like unto Thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression" (Micah 7:18). O the purity of that holiness which chose rather to punish the sins of the elect in His only begotten Son, than suffer them to go unpunished! O the abyss of His love to the world, for which He spared not His dearest Son, in order to spare sinners!

O the depth of the riches of unsearchable wisdom, by which He exercises mercy towards the penitent guilty, without any stain to the honor of the most impartial Judge! O the treasures of love in Christ, whereby He became a curse for us, in order to deliver us therefrom! How becoming the justified soul, who is ready to dissolve in the sense of this love, with full exultation to sing a new song, a song of mutual return of love to a justifying God. So important did the Apostle Paul, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, deem this doctrine, that the very first of his epistles in the New Testament is devoted to a full exposition thereof.

The pivot on which turns the entire contents of the Epistle to the Romans is that notable expression "the righteousness of God"--than which is none of greater moment to be found in all the pages of Holy Writ, and which it behooves every Christian to make the utmost endeavor to clearly understand. It is an abstract expression denoting the satisfaction of Christ in its relation to the Divine Law. It is a descriptive name for the material cause of the sinner's acceptance before God.

"The righteousness of God" is a phrase referring to the finished work of the Mediator as approved by the Divine tribunal, being the meritorious cause of our acceptance before the throne of the Most High. In the succeeding chapters (D. V.) we shall examine in more detail this vital expression "the righteousness of God," which connotes that perfect satisfaction which the Redeemer offered to Divine justice on the behalf of and in the stead of that people which had been given to Him.

Suffice it now to say that that "righteousness" by which the believing sinner is justified is called "the righteousness of God" (Rom. 1:17; 3:21) because He is the appointer, approver, and imputer of it. It is called "the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 1:1) because He wrought it out and presented it unto God. It is called "the righteousness of faith" (Rom. 4:13) because faith is the apprehender and receiver of it. It is called "man's righteousness" (Job 33:26) because it was paid for him and imputed to him.

All these varied expressions refer to so many aspects of that one perfect obedience unto death which the Saviour performed for His people. Yes, so vital did the Apostle Paul, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, esteem this doctrine of Justification, that he shows at length how the denial and perversion of it by the Jews was the chief reason of their being rejected by God: see the closing verses of Romans 9 and the beginning of chapter 10. Again; throughout the whole Epistle to the Galatians we find the Apostle engaged in most strenuously defending and zealously disputing with those who had assailed this basic truth.

Therein he speaks of the contrary doctrine as ruinous and fatal to the souls of men, as subversive of the cross of Christ, and calls it another gospel, solemnly declaring "though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you... let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:8). Alas, that under the latitudinal liberty and false "charity" of our day, there is now so little holy abhorrence of that preaching which repudiates the vicarious obedience of Christ which is imputed to the believer.

Under God, the preaching of this grand truth brought about the greatest revival which the Cause of Christ has enjoyed since the days of the Apostles. "This was the great fundamental distinguishing doctrine of the Reformation, and was regarded by all the Reformers as of primary and paramount importance. The leading charge which they adduced against the Church of Rome was that she had corrupted and perverted the doctrine of Scripture upon this subject in a way that was dangerous to the souls of men; and it was mainly by the exposition, enforcement, and application of the true doctrine of God's Word in regard to it, that they assailed and overturned the leading doctrines and practices of the Papal system.

There is no subject which possesses more of intrinsic importance than attaches to this one, and there is none with respect to which the Reformers were more thoroughly harmonious in their sentiments" (W. Cunningham). This blessed doctrine supplies the grand Divine cordial to revive one whose soul is cast down and whose conscience is distressed by a felt sense of sin and guilt, and longs to know the way and means whereby he may obtain acceptance with God and the title unto the Heavenly inheritance.

To one who is deeply convinced that he has been a life-long rebel against God, a constant transgressor of His Holy Law, and who realizes he is justly under His condemnation and wrath, no inquiry can be of such deep interest and pressing moment as that which relates to the means of restoring him to the Divine favour, remitting his sins, and fitting him to stand unabashed in the Divine presence: till this vital point has been cleared to the satisfaction of his heart, all other information concerning religion will be quite unavailing.

"Demonstrations of the existence of God will only serve to confirm and more deeply impress upon his mind the awful truth which he already believes, that there is a righteous Judge, before whom he must appear, and by whose sentence his final doom will be fixed. To explain the moral law to him, and inculcate the obligations to obey it, will be to act the part of a public accuser, when he quotes the statutes of the land in order to show that the charges which he has brought against the criminal at the bar are well founded, and, consequently, that he is worthy of punishment.

The stronger the arguments are by which you evince the immortality of the soul, the more clearly do you prove that his punishment will not be temporary, and that there is another state of existence, in which he will be fully recompensed according to his desert" (J. Dick). When God Himself becomes a living reality unto the soul, when His awful majesty, ineffable holiness, inflexible justice, and sovereign authority, are really perceived, even though most inadequately, indifference to His claims now gives place to a serious concern.

When there is a due sense of the greatness of our apostasy from God, of the depravity of our nature, of the power and vileness of sin, of the spirituality and strictness of the law, and of the everlasting burnings awaiting God's enemies, the awakened soul cries out, "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" (Micah 6:6, 7).

Then it is that the poor soul cries out, "How then can man be justified with God? or how can he be clean that is born of a woman?" (Job 25:4). And it is in the blessed doctrine which is now to be before us that we are taught the method whereby a sinner may obtain peace with his Maker and rise to the possession of eternal life. Again; this doctrine is of inestimable value unto the conscientious Christian who daily groans under a sense of his inward corruptions and innumerable failures to measure up to the standard which God has set before him.

The Devil, who is "the accuser of our brethren" (Rev. 12:10), frequently charges the believer with hypocrisy before God, disquiets his conscience, and seeks to persuade him that his faith and piety are nought but a mask and outward show, by which he has not only imposed upon others, but also on himself. But, thank God, Satan may be overcome by "the blood of the Lamb" (Rev. 12:11): by looking away from incurably depraved self, and viewing the Surety, who has fully answered for the Christian's every failure, perfectly atoned for his every sin, and brought in an "everlasting righteousness" (Dan. 9:24), which is placed to his account in the high court of Heaven.

And thus, though groaning under his infirmities, the believer may possess a victorious confidence which rises above every fear. This it was which brought peace and joy to the heart of the Apostle Paul: for while in one breath he cried, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. 7:24), in the next he declared, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). To which he added, "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect?"

It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" (vv. 33-35). May it please the God of all grace to so direct our pen and bless what we write unto the readers, that not a few who are now found in the gloomy dungeons of Doubting Castle, may be brought out into the glorious light and liberty of the full assurance of faith.

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